

From Two Points of View.

BY L. T. MEADE.

I.

The children were sitting very soberly in the school-room. They had finished their lessons for the day, and the governess, Miss Frere, was saying a few words to their mother in the next room. The school-room was a cheerful apartment, brightly furnished. It was at the top of the house, and had two windows, one facing north, the other south. The school-room table stood in the centre of the room, and the toys and books were arranged in neat order round the wall. There were four children, and each child had his or her cupboard, which was expected to be kept with exquisite neatness. Each child, too, had his or her bookshelf, and above the bookshelf was a place on the wall, where favourite pictures might be hung, or any other ornamental device carried out. The room was furnished with an eye to art, the colouring was soft and harmonious, and the fireplace and the windows were so arranged as to make the temperature pleasant. Whenever there was bright sunshine it came into the room through the southerly window, and the last rays of daylight could be treasured from the northern.

In short, it was a model school-room, and Mrs. Meadows, the mother of the four children, was very proud of it. She said a few words now to her governess, listened to some trivial complaints which this worthy woman thought well to make, gave some emphatic directions, and then, without stopping to visit the children in the next room, she tripped downstairs.

Mrs. Meadows was a nice-looking, very intelligent woman of about five-and-thirty. Her four children ranged in age from twelve to six; two of them were girls, two boys. They were spoken of by their friends and neighbours as "the good little Meadowses." This was not said in sarcasm, for they always looked so neat and fresh and

orderly, their manners were so correct, the ready and polite words flowed so easily from their lips that it was a perfect pleasure to talk to them.

Mrs. Meadows had determined from the very first to educate them after a plan. She consulted no one with regard to her plan, but she formed it with decision, and carried it out with spirit. She had a great contempt for the way her several friends brought up their families, and she was thoroughly pleased with the success of her own system.

Now she went downstairs to see her friend Mrs. Douglas, who had called rather inopportunistically to see her. Mrs. Meadows would have thought it very wrong indeed to be rude, but she did wish that poor Katie Douglas, dear good soul, would not drop in just at the very moment when she wanted to speak to Helen and Rose on a matter which their governess thought should come to her knowledge. She must defer the evil hour, however, and receive her friend with apparent cheerfulness.

Mrs. Douglas had two little girls who were certainly trained on no system whatever. They had no delightful warm school-room to learn their lessons in, their dresses were never particularly neat, and their manners were gauche—perhaps it would be more frank to say that they had no manners at all.

Mrs. Meadows had a certain affection for her friend—they had been school-fellows together—but her contempt for the little Douglasses scarcely knew any bounds.

"Well, my dear," she said now, holding out her two hands, and speaking in an affectionate, though guarded voice, "I am glad to see you, Katie; I am sorry to have kept you waiting for a few moments, but just when you arrived, Miss Frere was giving me her report,"

"Her report, dear, what of? I thought she was your governess. Is she secretary of any society as well?"

"Day after day, Katie," answered Mrs. Meadows, giving the fire a judicious stir as she spoke, "my governess, Miss Frere, reports to me on the moral, physical, and mental growth of each of the dear children committed to her charge. I usually take notes of what she says, and talk apart with each child before bedtime."

"And you find that a good system?" responded Mrs.

Douglas. "Oh, you always were a model creature, Helen, and what children you have! Now, there's my Bessie and Silkie—well, you see, they are not brought up on system."

Mrs. Meadows raised her brow satirically. She did not care to talk about the small Douglasses. She rang the bell, ordered in tea, and in her own mind wondered how Mrs. Douglas would feel when she had to render up an account of the way she had trained the unfortunate Bessie and Silkie.

Mrs. Douglas was a very bright, pretty little woman. She was a widow, and her means were small. She was not a grumbler, however, and wonderful to relate, people hardly ever heard her mention the word money. Certainly her children never did. She had no system, although she immensely admired it in others, and she often secretly envied Mrs. Meadows for her excellent management.

"What a delicious cup of tea you have given me, dear," she said. "The best children, the best mother, the best establishment generally. But now I must tell you, Helen, the reason why I called. I want to ask you *such* a favour."

Mrs. Meadows smiled.

"Don't you think," she said gently, "that you exhaust yourself unnecessarily?"

"What *do* you mean?"

"There, you are doing it again. You know, Katie, we have always been friends, and frank with each other. May I say something frank?"

Mrs. Douglas shivered.

"When Helen is frank she is almost *too* disagreeable," she mentally soliloquised. Aloud, however, she said, with apparent enthusiasm, "Say anything you like to me, Helen, I am glad when you advise me."

"Then I advise you to husband your strength. Your means are small, your children troublesome—it has pleased God to remove your husband from you."

"Oh, Helen."

Poor Katie's eyes filled with tears.

"Now am I unkind, dear? Do I mean it unkindly?"

Here Mrs. Meadows took her friend's cold little hands in hers.

"I have noticed you, Katie; and I observe that at every turn you waste your strength. You are always in a hurry,

or, perhaps, what is more to the purpose, always in a state of emphasis. When you walk, you run; in your own house you fly upstairs three times when once will do; even your mode of speech exhausts you."

"My mode of speech? I am sorry, I fail to see."

"You said just now 'I want you to grant me *such* a favour'—why that emphasis on *such*? You never make a speech that you don't specially emphasise one word—'*Do* tell me what you mean,' 'I am *so* glad to see you.' You positively waste your lung power by this silly trick alone. Katie, it is an awful thing to waste anything."

"Oh, yes, dear, thank you. I will try and remember your advice, Helen." She rose to go. "May I venture to make my little request?"

"Certainly you may."

"Bessie's birthday will be to-morrow. May Helen and Rose come and have tea with her?"

"Are you going to give a party? Can you afford it?"

"I can afford it perfectly, but I am not going to give one."

"Such very short notice. I like the children to be prepared gradually for their pleasures. The effect is better for their mental equilibrium."

"But to tell the truth, Bessie and I forgot all about the birthday until dinner time to-day. We were talking then about what we did this time last year, and suddenly Bessie said, 'Why, mother, it'll be my birthday to-morrow, I'll be ten years old.' Then I wondered what little treat I could give her, and I remembered your dear little girls, and I *thought*—I mean, I thought you'd oblige me."

Mrs. Meadows heard sounds upstairs. The four children were all coming down neatly dressed to the drawing-room. She wished to have them to herself, and was sincerely anxious to get rid of Mrs. Douglas, so she gave the required promise rather unwillingly, and bade her friend good-bye with a sense of relief.

Mrs. Douglas was scarcely out of the house before the children appeared. They were good-looking, their faces were refined, their dresses neat, but not gaudy, and their manners all that the fondest parents could desire.

"I am so glad you are alone, dear mother," said Helen, the eldest girl. "Archie and Rosie and Dick and I heard voices as we came downstairs. We were afraid you had company."

"Mrs. Douglas was with me. Don't lean so much on one leg, Helen. Rose, you are poking your chin out dreadfully." Mrs. Meadows's tone was not in the least fretful, but it was very firm. Helen became slightly constrained, and Rose tried to give herself a double chin. The boys walked over to the nearest window, one of them longed to whistle, the other to turn a somersault, but they knew that such reckless proceedings would not be permitted in the room with dear mother.

Mrs. Meadows sat down in an armchair in front of the fire, and the little girls placed themselves side by side on the edge of the sofa.

"Now," said the mother, looking at the clock, and speaking in a very cheerful voice, "we have exactly twenty minutes for pleasure, twenty minutes for relaxation. What shall we do with ourselves?"

Archie and Dick came forward. Dick's eyes sparkled, and after a moment of absolute silence he was audacious enough to nudge Archie, and then to propose a game of blind man's buff. Before this awful proposition had well penetrated Mrs. Meadows's brain, Helen said eagerly,

"Could not we do a recitation each, dear mother?"

"That is a good thought, Helen—a sensible, intelligent thought. But to-night, my dear, we will not think of it. The time permitted for us to be together is very short this evening, and you could not each of you recite a piece of poetry with effect. No, I think I will just say a word or two about a little pleasure which lies before my two dear girls."

The girls pricked their ears, the boys looked envious, and again Dick sincerely wished that he could shout or turn a somersault.

"A little pleasure," continued the mother, "which has come unexpectedly, and which, I trust, will be taken in moderation. Helen, you know your tendency is to day dream, and build castles in the air. In short, you are addicted to wandering thoughts, my love. Guard against this at lesson-hours to-morrow; determine that you will not allow one thought to stray to the coming pleasure."

"But what is it, dear mother?" asked Rose.

"My Rose must not be impatient. Well, girls, I think I can trust you. You are to drink tea at the Douglasses to-morrow night."

"Oh, I say," suddenly burst from Archie, "that little Bessie is no end of a brick."

"Archie, what does mother say about slang expressions?"

"I beg your pardon, dear mother."

"Granted, my son. Well, Rose and Helen, to resume. To-morrow evening you are to have tea at the Douglasses. To-morrow will be Bessie Douglas's birthday."

"You'll have to take her presents, girls," burst from Archie again.

Mrs. Meadows smiled at him, and for an instant permitted herself to pat his hard little brown hand.

"Thank you for reminding your sisters, Archie. I always like to encourage generous thoughts. Helen, you may take your little friend the blue jug with the brown and yellow dragon on it. Rose may present her with a copy of that admirable book, 'The Fairchild Family.'"

"Be sure you get her to read the story of the dead man who was hung up on a gibbet," whispered Dick to his youngest sister.

Mrs. Meadows shook her finger at her little boy.

"Dick, has mother, or has she not, told you not to whisper in company?"

"As it's a birthday party, I suppose we had better wear our pink dresses with the embroidered sashes, dear mother?" queried Helen.

The pink dresses had just been sent from Paris. They were elegant and costly in price. Mrs. Meadows could scarcely suppress a shudder as she thought of these beautiful garments having the free run of Mrs. Douglas's untidy house.

"You will wear your brown hollands, my dears," she said. "Your brown washing hollands, with neat black shoes. But, our time is up. Kiss me, my dears, and instantly go upstairs to your preparation. Quietly, Dick—gently, Archie; now, out of the room in orderly file. Helen and Rose, I have a word to say to each of you before bed-time."

"Very well, dear mother," responded the two little girls.

"They certainly are good children," murmured their parent. "I shall have great satisfaction out of them by-and-bye."

(To be continued.)